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ART. I.—*Poems by James G. Percival.* 12mo, pp. 346. New Haven, 1821.

IT happens to almost all men of superior talents, to have made an essay at poetry, in early life. Whatever direction be finally forced upon them, by strong circumstances or strong inclination, there is a period after the imagination is awakened, and the affections are excited, and before the great duties and cares of life begin, when almost all men of genius write a few lines, in the shape of a patriotic song, a sonnet by Julio in the magazine, or lines to some fair object. This is the natural outlet and expression of youthful enthusiasm and warmth; and young men are poetical at the same age and for the same reasons, that they are apt to be flighty in their characters, and imprudent in their conduct. Poetry of this kind is a little intellectual dissipation, which calls up a blush on the cheek of the veteran in some profession, after a twenty years' recollection, as a youthful foible is also remembered with regret; but neither the sin of morals nor of taste is set down among the unpardonable. Certain forward young men moreover try their hand at almost every thing. Not that they have no prevailing taste, which will finally disclose itself for some one pursuit; and not because they are even now incapable of confining themselves to a manly choice of an occupation; but, like the generous ancients, they feel a lively interest in all the efforts of the understanding; and so when their zeal happens

to be excited by passion within, or nature without, or patriotic spirit, or any occasional impulse, it bursts out in poetry. Plato wrote verses when he was a young man, and wrote poetry always; but he had the discretion to burn his verses, and has raised his poetry to a higher strain, than any mere inspiration of the muse, by the admixture of a sublime philosophy. Cicero wrote poetry, but unluckily for his reputation he did not imitate Plato's example; and some of his verses have survived and betrayed themselves to the world. As a general rule, young men ought to be counselled to take Plato and not Cicero for their model on this occasion, and to commit carefully to the flames all this first species of poetry. Even if they have a strong poetical genius, it will rarely happen that these first flights will do it justice. If Virgil wrote the little pieces, which bear his name—Virgil, who in the severity of his judgment condemned the *Æneid* to the flames—what would be his mortification, could he return to life, to find the *Culex*, and the *Copa*, and the *Moretum* extant? Lord Byron would gladly have toiled many busy days to have redeemed his Hours of Idleness from the world's knowledge. The difficulty is, that this youthful poetry, which is very creditable to the young men and women who write it, which fills up a corner handsomely in a newspaper, helps on the periodical dulness of a magazine, and is a treasure to the happy *album*, which can boast of something *original*, is in reality a very different thing from that other native poetry, that sixth sense of the mind, that quicker perception, deeper thought, stronger feeling, prophetic warmth, vaster comprehension, and more glowing and expressive utterance, with which it is sometimes injuriously confounded. That it is different, witness all the *corpuscles* of ancient and modern days, melancholy thesauruses of *minor* poets, (a phrase that commits suicide in its terms) sets of works in scores of volumes, containing under the sacred name of the Poets of a language, authors and the works of authors, of which the memory, the tradition would else be lost. These all thought themselves poets in their day. In the morning of life, their feelings were keen and lively. Well bred and well educated young men, they thought delicately on all subjects, and commanded a good flow of words out of the best books they had read; and when they had wrought up this cheap material into couplets and stanzas, and procured it the admiration of their friends and mistress, and accumulated it to a

volume's size, they ushered it into the world, a candidate for its favour.

Many productions, to which it would be paying an extravagant compliment to apply even the foregoing remarks, are daily appearing among us, and it becomes a delicate question with all conscientious, patriotic, and good natured critics in what manner they should be noticed. These authors, for obvious reasons, are commonly of that class of the *genus irritabile vatum*, who have more of the irritabile than of the vatum in their composition; and the better they are as moderate poets, the more unpromising is their condition, and the more infallibly are they involved in that sad but most oracular sentence,

Mediocribus esse poetis
Non homines, non Di, non concessere columnæ.

We say our duty in relation to the productions we allude to is delicate, for they are a species of thing, which our canons do not recognize. They cannot come into our court with any claim whatever. Pretty good poetry is no poetry at all. This the misguided aspirants themselves feel. Authors in most other departments think it a satisfactory praise, if they are admitted to have done as well, as their talents and means permit. But to say that poetry is not excellent is a proposition which nullifies itself; it is to deny under the tender saving of an accident, that which is essential to the substance. For this reason, most young men are glad to write their poetry, as they sow their wild oats; and think as little of building a permanent literary character on one, as a moral character on the other. But the season, while it lasts, is one of such flourish and restless excitement, there is such a bustle made about the moon and field-flowers, and nature and passion; and the whole circle of friends, acquaintances, and neighbours is kept in such an uneasy stir while the fit is on, and above all the unhappy critics are so *beteased* for their suffrage, then so denounced by the poet if it is adverse, and by the public if it is favourable, that for ourselves we carry a young and promising countryman through his poetry, with much the sort of feeling that a prudent mother carries her children through the measles, and are glad if he has had it well.

These remarks are extorted from us by the present state of the American Parnassus. No species of mental effort appears to have been so attractive, of late, in our community as the

poetical; the trunk-makers can bear us witness. The most unhappy circumstance is, that a good deal of this poetry has been quite respectable, and such as in the time and place which elicited it, would have done its authors credit; nay, of which, without a complimentary overrating, a critic might speak as hopefully, as of the majority of political pamphlets, of voyages and travels, and the journals thereof, which have been appearing simultaneously from our press. Did we however say this, did we, in reviewing such poems, observe that they discovered laudable industry, that the author had spared no pains to make them good, that we gave him credit for an intense labour bestowed on every line, that he had consulted all the preceding poets, and borrowed from them every thing which his subject admitted, that he had evinced a praiseworthy diffidence of his own powers, that there was not a couplet in his works which did not testify to a hopeful teachableness, and that in confining himself to the technical dialect of poetry, choosing no epithets but such as Pope had used before, making his heroes all corsairs, and his heroines all ladies of the lake, he was determined to approve himself as a painstaking, unpretending, and docile bard; did we say this, as we might with truth of most of our current poetry, we doubt whether the authors would even admit that we damned with faint praise. We have little question it would be set down as positive fault-finding and carping, and the old insipid changes be rung upon the injustice, the malignity, and stupidity of critics. Yet the same sort of praise would content a modest writer of almost any other description; and to be told that he had carefully studied, and faithfully followed his predecessors, would often be the highest commendation, which could be paid to an essay on ordinary topics of science and speculation. Unable, therefore, to give pleasure by honestly speaking our opinion and awarding that meed of qualified commendation which may be due, and not being particularly pleased to belie our consciences by so mean a submission as flattering poor poetry—of all poor things in the world—we have preserved a somewhat gloomy silence, with respect to many of the productions of our native bards. This silence has, we regret to say, been occasionally carried beyond its proper limits; and various causes, which will suggest themselves to those initiated into the mysteries of reviewing, have prevented our enjoying the greatest pleasure of our vocation, that of expressing our admiration of a few

charming pieces, which have appeared among us. We were singularly straightened between the desire to do credit to our pages by an honourable notice of Fanny, and the difficulty we felt in these remote and somewhat saturnine latitudes in entering, with true perception, into the local spirit and humour of that agreeable little poem. We cannot, however, suppress the hope that its just and merited success will invite the author to higher efforts, and encourage him to undertake a poetical composition of elevated pretensions.

We are consoled, moreover, in our neglect of this and a few other pieces of genuine merit or great promise, which have appeared among us, by the consideration that of all faculties the poetical is the most independent; the least aided by applause, the least depressed by censure, the least capable of being obstructed or furthered by all that critics, of malign or benevolent aspect, can proclaim. If it dwell not in the native vivacity of the mind, you cannot create or quicken it, by the breath of fame; and if it really exist in native truth, tenderness, and power, all persecution that falls short of secluding it from pen, ink, and paper, instead of subduing, nourishes it; and, according to the temper of the individual, makes it pathetic or indignant or philosophical. Lord Byron's genius was unquestionably matured and kindled by the provoking reception of his first essays; and though Milton had fallen on evil days, and lived in a community prepared to purchase his *Paradise Lost* for ten pounds, it does not appear that his muse drooped a moment in the chilly atmosphere. On the contrary, we owe to it one of the sweetest strains of his heavenly lyre. So well established is it, that disappointment and sorrow are the nurse of poetical inspiration, that our philosophical statesman, in his *Notes on Virginia*, seriously mentions it as a circumstance that confirms the intellectual inferiority of the blacks. 'Misery,' he beautifully observes, 'is often the parent of the most affecting touches of poetry. Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry.*' Were the poets among us as miserable as their works, there would be some hope.

We are therefore quite sure no permanent injury is done to a poet of the true vein, by a temporary neglect of his productions. So far from this, we can name more than one living bard, in our own language, who, could he by any momentary insen-

* *Jefferson's Notes on Virginia*, p. 274.

sibility of the public, have been forced in upon his resources, wrought or stung to higher efforts, to longer and more exalted vigils, would have consulted his permanent reputation. Lord Byron tells us in the letter reviewed in our last number, that, excepting Campbell and Rogers, all the living poets have written too much. Scott first proved this, and so much to his own conviction, that he has wholly ceased; and though we happen to be of the number who have read all his larger poetical works with delight, and have found on them all the impress of a poetical genius of the first order, yet the public was growing a-weary of so protracted a series of productions, which in the main were merely pleasing and lively, better, to be sure, of their kind than any body but their own author could write, but proved by the simple rapidity of their succession, to be beneath his own powers. Moreover, as the public interest began to flag in Scott, Byron urged it with so much intensity and assiduity, that it was the sooner exhausted, alike toward the one and the other; and though the adventurous cast of Byron's character and writings, have fixed the public interest longer upon him, than it appears to have dwelt on Scott, yet we presume the noble bard had felt the public pulse, and took warning, when on publishing one of the latest of his larger poems, he said that it was the last which for many years he should submit to the public.* Though it would have cost us the third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold*, and *Manfred*, we are sorry he did not keep his word. This fatal popularity of his works, like the 'fatal facility,' as his lordship calls it, of the eight syllable verse, has betrayed both him and his poetical colleagues into the composition of more poetry, than they could finish in a style worthy of themselves.

Without pursuing this topic, we cannot but observe that we see no consideration of duty or patriotism, which calls on us to exert the little credit we may have with the public, in encouraging the multitude of indifferent poetical essays which are made among us. It is almost the only species of literature which practice and pains do not make perfect. It is the first duty of the critic to foster the science and literature of his

* In the dedication of the *Corsair* to Mr Moore in June 1814 his lordship says, 'I dedicate to you the last production with which I shall trespass on public patience, and your indulgence for some years; and I own that I feel anxious to avail myself of this latest and only opportunity of adorning my pages with a name,' &c.

country, and we can boldly appeal to our pages themselves for the proof, that we have been ready to go as far as conscience would let us, in encouraging every thing American. Where we could not commend positively, or augur favourably, we have been silent; and with all the indifferent and wretched trash, which is issuing from the American, as from every other free press, and out of which it would cost us no effort to enliven our heavy pages, and furnish many a gay interlude to our sober speculations; we cannot recal three instances, in which we have indulged in what most of our readers would think our bounden duty to them, that of saving them the trouble and cost of finding out the worthlessness of the productions in question. Farther than this, however, we shall not be carried on the lenient extreme. Apart from every consideration of duty, no kindness can be more treacherous than the encouragement given to ordinary verses called poetry. They lead to nothing good. Their author is but flattered the more deeply into his delusion, to be awakened at last more bitterly therefrom; while the credit of the public literature is suffering in the accumulation of these productions. The reasons which exist for encouraging moderate merit in other departments, really do not exist here; for moderate merit in poetry will not grow into excellence; and, as we have already said, the poetry that is not excellent is not worth any thing. The only result, on the most favourable supposition of this ill-judged kindness, is the production of such compositions as Barlow's *Columbiad*, a heavy epic, laboriously wrought out of an over-flattered occasional poem; a work which, as a poem, contains nothing of which an American can be proud, and which can have no effect but that of misleading the taste of the young at home, and the judgments which critics abroad entertain of our literature.

We fear it will be a characteristic of these remarks, which have swelled in length and formality beyond our original purpose, that, like most prefaces, they have little connexion with what is to follow them. The poems before us of Mr Percival appear to us to contain decided indications of genuine poetical talent. We have not the pleasure of knowing any thing of the author, beyond the showing of these his works, nor are we informed whether his vocation will continue to lead him along the flowery paths of the muses. Sure we are, however, that the little volume which he has presented us, contains the marks of an inspiration more lofty and genuine than any similar col-

lection of fugitive pieces, which has come to our notice from a native bard. We hope with this sincere tribute, we shall be excused for adding that the volume contains a great deal too much. It is not in human nature that so many small effusions from one hand, and produced within so short a compass of years, should all possess that *felicity*, which is the great charm of fugitive pieces. Every person gifted with a moderate share of invention, knows that it is easier to produce a performance of considerable compass and arrangement, than an equal amount in short pieces, of all of which the merit should be equally great. In a long piece our indulgence is extended to the feeble or colder portions if the production in the main, be good, but a *copy of verses*, which is ordinary, appears even to the greater disadvantage, for standing in better company. Moreover, we cannot conceive it worth while, for an author of Mr Percival's poetical powers to devote so much time to the accumulation of these small pieces. He must, we doubt not, possess, with the genius, the ambition of the true poet; and with this ambition, why should he not take up a theme of extended interest, and aim at a permanent poetical fame. It is true this collection contains one entire tragedy, written, it appears, at the age of nineteen and twenty years, but the least valuable part of the volume. It is hinted in the preface that it was written for an occasion, and it has all the appearances of being written *musâ invitâ*. The plot is without interest or probability, a cold imitation of the Revenge; and the language is tame and prosaic, and far beneath the glow of Mr Percival's other pieces. And though to be able to write any tragedy in blank verse be highly creditable to a young man of nineteen, yet he should remember that tragedy is not only, in the words of Milton, as it was anciently composed, 'the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems,' but also by far the most difficult of execution.

Of the smaller pieces which this volume contains, many have already attained uncommon popularity in the newspapers. In reading the whole series, the reader will find in them a great uniformity, and the constant recurrence of a technical poetical imagery, which is far from adding to their beauty, though a fault naturally enough incident to a large collection of little pieces, written without reference to each other. The following will afford a good specimen of our author's patriotic manner :

Ode on the emancipation of South America.

'Star of the southern pole—
 That from the Atlantic deep
 Rose, and on Andes' steep
 Shone with a beacon-light,
 And woke from moral night
 The Spaniard's haughty soul !—
 They started from their sleep, and tore
 The chains that bound them to their tyrant's throne :
 Uncheered, unaided, they alone
 Their banner reared on Plata's shore,
 And in the dawning light of Liberty
 Swore they would live and die united, firm, and free.

Where rising o'er the silver tide,
 That rolls its host of waters wide,
 Resistless as a sea,
 Fair shine their city's happy walls :
 Convened within the sacred halls
 Of infant Liberty,
 They banded round their flag, and gave
 Redemption to the fettered slave ;
 And o'er those plains like ocean spread,
 And o'er their mountains' icy head,
 And o'er their full majestic river,
 And through their halls, their fanes, their towers,
 They lit a flame, shall burn for ever ;
 Nor tyranny with all her powers,
 Though battled in her *holy league*, shall dare
 The statue they have reared from its high column tear.

Sister in freedom ! o'er the main
 We send our hearts to thee ;
 Oh ! ne'er may kings and priests again
 Stain with their steps thy flowery plain,
 Nor vex the brave and free.
 When earth beside was wrapped in night,
 Here Freedom lit her quenchless light,
 And hence its rays shall always beam,
 And Europe yet shall hear the voice,
 And wake from her inglorious dream,
 And in her new-found strength rejoice.
 In one fraternal band, let all
 The nations, who would spurn the chains
 That tyrants forge, would burst their thrall,

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And wash away their servile stains,
 And, proud of independent worth,
 In honest dignity go forth ;
 Let all, who will not bow the knee,
 Nor humbly kiss the trampling heel,
 Who swear to perish or be free,
 Unite, and draw their flashing steel,
 And, proud and daring in their second birth,
 Purge from its crowns and thrones the renovated earth.'

In the class of the amatory poems the following has seemed to us among the prettiest :

Star of my heart ! thy light has gone,
 A cloud has hid it from my view,
 A night has come that has no dawn,
 A storm I cannot struggle through ;
 For like a boatman on the deep,
 Without a compass, or an oar,
 Where wild winds howl and tempests sweep,
 My life must still drift on, and find no port, no shore.

Well—I have toiled to reach a haven,
 Where joy at length in peace might dwell,
 And many a mountain billow *braven*,
 Still drawn by thy bewitching spell :
 It led me on through all that life
 Had dark and cold and hard for me,
 For still I hoped to end this strife,
 And that my last bright days might sweetly flow with thee.

Thou smiledst a beacon on that shore,
 Where fancy builds her airy bowers,
 And gems her grotts with sparkling ore,
 And weaves her shady arch of flowers ;
 And I did hope thy light would shine,
 And charm with beam more warm and bright,
 And still I hoped its rays were mine—
 A sullen cloud came o'er, and all was wrapped in night.

But though my course is lone and wild,
 Through *booming* waves, and wreck, and sorrow,
 I would be firm as when day smiled :
 Beyond the grave, there shines a morrow.
 Awhile chilled, harassed, dashed, and tost,
 Through raging seas I plough my way
 To some dark, undiscovered coast,
 Where hope holds out no flag and mercy lights no ray.'

The little piece called *Serenade* is uncommonly graceful and airy ; and though rather too long, we will extract it entire.

Softly the moonlight
Is shed on the lake,
Cool is the summer night—
Wake ! O awake !
Faintly the curfew
Is heard from afar,
List ye ! O list
To the lively guitar.

Trees cast a mellow shade
Over the vale,
Sweetly the serenade
Breathes in the gale,
Softly and tenderly
Over the lake,
Gaily and cheerily—
Wake ! O awake !

See the light pinnace
Draws nigh to the shore,
Swiftly it glides
At the heave of the oar,
Cheerily plays
On its buoyant car,
Nearer and nearer
The lively guitar.

Now the wind rises
And ruffles the pine,
Ripples foam-crested
Like diamonds shine,
They flash where the waters
The white pebbles lave,
In the wake of the moon,
As it crosses the wave.

Bounding from billow
To billow, the boat
Like a wild swan is seen
On the waters to float ;
And the light dipping oars
Bear it smoothly along
In time to the air
Of the gondolier's song.

And high on the stern
Stands the young and the brave,
As love-led he crosses
The star-spangled wave,
And blends with the murmur
Of water and grove
The tones of the night,
That are sacred to love.

His gold-hilted sword
At his bright belt is hung,
His mantle of silk
On his shoulder is flung,
And high waves the feather,
That dances and plays
On his cap where the buckle
And rosary blaze.

The maid from her lattice
Looks down on the lake,
To see the foam sparkle,
The bright billow break,
And to hear in his boat,
Where he shines like a star,
Her lover so tenderly
Touch his guitar.

She opens her lattice,
And sits in the glow
Of the moonlight and star-light,
A statue of snow ;
And she sings in a voice,
That is broken with sighs,
And she darts on her lover
The light of her eyes.

His love-speaking pantomime
Tells her his soul—
How wild in that sunny clime
Hearts and eyes roll.
She waves with her white hand
Her white fazzolet,
And her burning thoughts flash
From her eyes' living jet.

The moonlight is hid
In a vapour of snow !

Her voice and his rebeck
 Alternately flow ;
 Re-echoed they swell
 From the rock on the hill ;
 They sing their farewell,
 And the music is still.'

Our limits do not permit us to make a farther selection of the smaller pieces. Besides them, the volume contains the tragedy, of which we have already spoken ; some miscellaneous poems in a more sustained and elevated character ; and Prometheus, a discursive and philosophical poem, in a hundred and sixty two stanzas of the Spenserian measure. This seems to us—though highly unequal—the most vigorous and powerful poetry which the volume contains. Not a few of these verses have all the dark sententiousness of Byron, clothed in an uncommonly easy versification. The following will, we think, justify the remark :

CXLVI.

' The past is gone—it can return no more,
 The dew of life exhaled, its glory set ;
 It has no other goods for me in store,
 It is a dreary wilderness, and yet
 I fondly look and linger. In the net
 Of pleasure, all the breathings of my soul,
 The burning thoughts alone on learning set
 In tender childhood, pointed to the goal,
 Where bards and sages aimed, in youth blind leaders stole,

CXLVII.

' And vile companions rifled, and they left
 My heart dispirited and sunk and poor,
 Of all its highest hopes and wants bereft,
 A pinnacle on the waves with naught to moor
 Or bind it to the safe bank ; from the shore,
 Where my best powers stood weeping o'er the deep,
 Tossing and madly heaving, wild winds bore
 My dark, distracted being where fiends keep
 Their orgies, and the worm, that gnaws, will never sleep.

CLXVIII.

There is no hope—ten years the winds have blown,
 That bore me to my ruin, and the waves
 Roll in my wake like mountains—joy has flown,
 And left behind the lonely turfless graves

Of early fond attachments. Like the slaves
 Bound fettered to the galley, at the oar
 Still must I toil uncheered, or in the caves,
 Where not a ray of hope comes, I must pour
 Tears, bitter tears, that well from the heart's bleeding core.

CXLIX.

The soul, that had its home with me, was bright,
 Its early promise as the flowers of spring,
 Profuse in richness as the dawning light,
 When the gay rosy-footed hours take wing,
 And from the glowing east the coursers spring,
 That bear the car of day along its road,
 And o'er a waking world their radiance fling—
 So bright the stream of mind within me flowed,
 It had one only wish—to scale the high abode,

CL.

Where Truth has reared her awful throne, and pure
 Platonic Beauty sits, a smiling bride,
 The Majesty that bows, and to allure,
 The winning charms of Virtue by his side—
 Cursed be the drawling pedants, who divide
 The monarch from his lovely queen, and sink
 The soul in stupid awe, too soon to hide
 Its coward head in pleasure's lap and drink
 Her tempting fiery draughts—Stop! ye are on the brink

CLI.

Of endless woe and ruin—

CLVI.

To feel a heart within thee, tender, flowing
 In tears at others' pain, and racked with thine;
 A soul, that longs for high attainments, glowing
 For all that can ennoble, raise, refine,
 Whose dearest longings seem almost divine,
 The insatiate grasp for knowledge, and the aim
 Of tireless, fearless virtue, then to pine,
 Unknown, unvalued, and to quench the flame
 Of mind in some low slough, and bid farewell to fame : &c.

The Prometheus, like most of the other pieces, breathes a melancholy spirit too deep not to be real. We should sincerely regret that powers, so fine as Mr Percival evidently posses-

ses, should want that self-consciousness, which they ought to inspire, or should feel a doubt of that public favour, they so truly deserve : and though he probably does not rely on any thing he has yet written, as giving him a fair title to the rank of a classical American poet, yet we feel no hesitation in saying, that he shares with few the gifts, which might make him one.

ART. II.—*Views of Society and Manners in America ; in a series of letters from that country to a friend in England, during the years 1818, 1819 and 1820. By an English-woman. From the first London edition, with additions and corrections by the author. 8vo, pp. 387. New York, 1821.*

THIS work has been so extensively read in America, that a review of it, at the present time, may seem unnecessary. As it forms, however, in many respects a contrast with other works of the same class, and is distinguished for its flattering tone toward our country, it might seem a failure in respect to so courteous a foreigner, to allow her work to pass unnoticed. We cannot, at the same time, but feel ourselves under much embarrassment in speaking of it. Like all human productions, it has, of course, its imperfections ; but as American critics, it would seem a piece of rudeness to be at pains to gather up these, from the pages in which our character, manners, and institutions are so advantageously portrayed. On the other hand, our country, not to say our own poor labours, is so handsomely eulogized by this polite stranger, that we should be thought perhaps to speak under prepossession, if we were very forward in maintaining the merits of her book.

We know not, in fact, a less enviable task than that of the traveller, who undertakes to publish an account of a short visit to a foreign country, and feels at all concerned for the reception his book may meet with in that country. It is impossible in a short visit, or even in a long *visit*, to become so thoroughly acquainted with a country, considerably different in character from your own, as not to be constantly exposed to mistakes in detailed statements of its peculiarities. Then the traveller, who is well received, falls into some circle, which has its local or political party ; he becomes imbued with their feelings, and